



BRAND ATTITUDE MEDIATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF BRAND CONNECTION AND PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT: A CASE OF ADOLESCENT CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to assess the mediating relationship between self brand connection, brand attitude and involvement among adolescents consumers in India.

Design/methodology/approach: A survey of 800 adolescent consumers were conducted and the data was analysed using various statistical tools such as regression, correlation and mediation.

Findings: The results of the study suggests that there is a strong relationship between self brand connection, brand attitude and involvement among adolescents in India and it further identify that brand attitude plays a mediating role between self brand connection and product involvement.

Originality/value: The paper discusses the relationship between self brand connection, brand attitude and product involvement and that too among the adolescent consumers particularly in developing country like India.

KEYWORDS: Adolescent, Attitude, Brand, Involvement and Self brand connection

1. INTRODUCTION:

Indian consumerism is developing rapidly and the country's consumers have moved from price consideration to a desire for designer and quality products. That is to say, they now have a keenness to experiment with mainstream style (Biswas, 2006) oriented products. This development of consumerism is leading to a demand for luxury and international brands. The growing income and demand of Indian consumers is also leading to an increase in consumer consumption. India's urban population is expected to reach 85 million over the next 10 years, becoming second only to China (Biswas, 2006). Moreover, India has been referred as country of adolescent generation as 1.136 billion people out of which an approximately 350 million are in the age group of 10-24 years. Thus, about 54 % of Indians are below the age of 25 (IBEF, 2008), therefore there is incredible possibility for brand penetration in India thus creating an exigent task for the marketers to make investment in this huge market segment.

The young generation of India has been raised in the post liberalization era of fast growth and optimism (Bharadwaj, Swaroop, & Vittal, 2005) and are more confident about the future. Thus have an effect on the product categories and brands they choose (Bharadwaj et al., 2005). According to Batat, the behaviours associated with the young competent consumers are described as good management of pocket money, excellent decision makers, tech-savvy to get better their consumption skills, dealing with salespeople, seeking appropriate assistance and advice, judgmental shopping, controlling impulsive purchasing, modernization by consumption and usage, awareness of internet risks and consumer morals. Therefore, it can be established that they are entirely competent consumers as they revealed their competency in some aspects of consumption.

Consumer behaviour researchers have recognized the importance of the consumer's self-concept and its relationship to brands and marketable entities. The developmental stage of adolescent in terms of both physical and cognitive differentiates them from other consumer segments. As cognitive abilities build up in adolescence, children are able to recognize, on a deeper level, who they actually are. "One's self-concept becomes more psychological, more abstract, and more of a coherent, integrated self-portrait from childhood throughout adolescence" (Shaffer, 2002).

The current generation is entirely distinct from the previous ones in terms of brand consciousness, anxiety related to brand names, style and current trends existing in the market (Koester and May, 1985 and Daters 1990). They have turned out to be highly conscious buyers who always look at different options available in the market, remain engaged over Internet and understand the worth of the products. Thus they have become more informed and procure products only after going through their own detailed research, rather than just relying on marketers. Schor (2004) has referred adolescents as ".....the usually brand oriented, consumer involved, and materialistic generation in history." Hence, they desire to acquire those brands that fit into their self concept therefore, creating self brand connection.

Self brand connection can be referred as the degree to which brand expresses imperative aspects of the consumer's identity, morals and goals (Fournier, 1998). Since meaningful brand connections measure the extent to which the brand is significant enough to be related to the consumer's self concept and psychological needs, then individuals with strong self brand connection must show evidence of higher levels of attitude. Therefore Strong attitudes is expected to be constant over time, unwilling to change, and probably have a strong impact on self brand connection (Krosnick, 1988 ;Krosnick and Petty, 1995)

It is noteworthy to state that the adolescents after developing a positive attitude towards a brand get exclusively involved with a purchasing of branded products. Several researchers of consumer behaviour have attributed an immense importance to the product involvement behaviour. However, there are very few researches, which have addressed product involvement among adolescents. Thus, this research work tries to highlight the relationship between self brand connection, attitude and involvement.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The Indian consumer market has sustained to grow buoyed by swift economic growth, urbanisation, media propagation, and also the hard earned efforts by consumer goods' companies to grow the market. It is beyond doubt that Indian markets are maturing and growing to emerge as one of the best market for branded products. Therefore, leading this trend to accelerate over the years to come.

Brands consist of both physical and socio-psychological attributes. They are turned out to be most vital in many aspects as they are one of the most precious belongings that companies have and play a crucial role in the process of customers' choice of products, as today's customers are highly aware and brand conscious. They identify brands as most important rather than its attributes. Fournier (1998) was one of the first to conceptualize consumer brand relationships. Thus, consumer and a brand are theorized as being in a dyadic relationship similar to a relationship between two people. Subsequently, brand relationships can help consumers develop and communicate something about who they are, who they were, or who they aspire to be. Hence, companies are making efforts to find out the ways to create strong brand connections with their customers.

2.1 Self brand connection:

Self concept is the entirety of the individual's opinion and belief about himself (Rosenberg, 1979). It refers to all the responsiveness that the person deliberately elaborates about himself/herself in reference to the physical appearance, associations with others and opinion in definite situations. Therefore, thoughtful consideration of self-concept helps the marketers to understand the way consumers make choices in the perspective of symbolic meanings attached to diverse brands (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). They at times develop into dedicated to brands that facilitate them to create or represent their desired self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Escalas, 2004; Cooper et al., 2010). Consequently, the consumers have formed "self-brand connection" based on the congruency between the individual's "self-image" and the "brand-image" (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Through a process of harmonizing, consumers repeatedly select products and brands that are similar with their self-images (Dolich, 1969; Chaplin and John, 2005; Hankinson, 2004). This process is fostered by the extensive accessibility of brands and the display of images that those brands represent (Chaplin and John, 2005). As consumers ascertain fit between their self-concepts and brand images, they are able to make self-brand connections.

Self-brand connections are created when brands engender strong and favourable brand associations from the consumer's perspective (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). "The fundamental premise of the Self brand connection construct is that when brand associations (meanings) are used to construct one's self or to communicate one's self to others, a strong connection is formed between the brand and the consumer's self identity. However, the creation of a strong and meaningful self brand connection is more likely to occur when the consumer's personal experience with the brand is closely tied to the image of the brand, and when the brand itself satisfies an identified psychological need" (Escalas, 2004). Thus it has been suggested by Chaplin and Roedder John (2005) that as individuals enter adolescence not only do they recognize themselves better, but also begin to be acquainted with the concept of the brand leading to improved brand awareness (Ross and Harradine, 2004).

2.2 Brand attitude:

The self brand connections have a constructive relationship with attitudes toward the brand Escalas (2004). Consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand are also likely to have a favourable attitude toward it. Thus, a consumer's by and large evaluations of a brand, can form the source for purchase intentions as well as actual behaviour termed as a brand attitude (Low & Lamb, 2000). The self brand connections influence attitudes toward an organization to which respondents are emotionally involved or "connected. One of the arguments supporting the significance of the self brand connections construct is that consumers with highly developed self brand connections explain evidence of stronger and more confident brand attitudes. Thus, the above inferences points towards the fact that self brand connections have a positive influence on attitude. Such attitudes can serve a value expressive meaning by allowing individuals to articulate their self-concepts (Keller, 1993).

2.3 Product Involvement:

Attitude leads to the creation of involvement among consumers. Product involvement reflects pleasure that a particular product category may be relatively central to people's lives, their sense of identity, and their association with the rest of the world. Thus the core meaning of product involvement refers to the degree to which an individual is involved with a given product.

The powerful effect of the product involvement that young people understand is the strength and significance of the product in their lives already from a young age, think about and formulate their attitudes, and are influenced accordingly. Mittal and Lee (1989) have brief the idea of involvement as level of personal relevance of the decision to the individual in terms of their basic values, goals and self-concept. When consumers make up an attitude towards the product as being significant and meaningful they get highly involved in the product (Te'eni-Harari et al., 2009) and they accept it based on its symbolic attributes (O'Cass, 2000; Zaichowsky, 1985). Thus, a positive attitude creates a sense of involvement among consumers. Hence, Bowen and Chaffee (1974) and Bloch (1981) also view involvement as a relation between consumer and product.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES/HYPOTHESES

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the relationship between self brand connections and attitude towards brand.
2. To find out the relationship between self brand connection and product involvement.
3. To investigate the mediating role of attitude on self brand connections and product involvement relationship

The research hypotheses formulated for the purpose of the study are;

H₁: Self brand connections are positively related to brand attitude.

H₂: Higher is the self brand connection higher is the product involvement.

H₃: Attitude has a mediating role on self brand connections and product involvement

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sample and Response Rate:

The study has been conducted on the basis of primary data, which has been collected from Delhi and Punjab. The data was collected using the convenience sampling technique through the distribution of structured questionnaire among 800 adolescents respondents in the age group of 11-17 years, out of which 560 questionnaires were found to be usable constituting 70% response rate. The sample size was calculated by using the sampling by proportionate method with 95% confidence level and margin of error of 3 percent. The analysis below is based on these responses only.

4.2 Instrument used:

For the purpose of the study, a questionnaire was framed using a seven point likert scale consisting of statements covering four main constructs i.e self brand connection, attitude, attitude strength and involvement. All concerned constructs were measured using 7 point likert scale where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 7 represents 'strongly agree' with a mid point labelled 4 'neither agree nor disagree'. The measuring instruments used under study were sourced from existing validated scale. The study used Escalas and Bettmann scale (2004) for measuring Self brand connection, Batra and Satyan (1991) for measuring attitude, Krosnick (1993) for measuring attitude strength and Zaichowsky (1985) for measuring involvement.

4.3 Measure:

The data so collected was analysed using SPSS Statistics 23. Correlation, Regression and Baron method for testing mediation effect were conducted for hypotheses testing.

4.4 Statistical Analysis of Sample Description

In the survey, male respondents account for 53%, and female respondents account for 47%. On the age structure, adolescents belonging to age group 11-14 constitute 34.6% those who are between 15-17 year account for 65.4%. On the basis of family Income structure, adolescents consumers belonging to income group upto 1 lakh constitute 23.2%, between 1-5 lakhs constitute 60.7% and above 5 lakh constitute 16.1 %. The distributed architecture of samples is reasonable.

4.5 Reliability and Validity of Questionnaire:

4.5 a Reliability:

To test the reliability of the data so collected, reliability analysis was done by using Cronbach Alpha. Cronbach Alpha over 0.70 illustrates high reliability of the instrument. All the constructs in this research have Cronbach alpha above minimum acceptable score of 0.70 thereby indicating high internal reliability and value of KMO is 0.9.

Table 4.5.1: Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Number of items	Source of items	Reliability Cronbach alpha
Self brand connection	6	Escalas and Bettmann (2004)	0.893
Attitude	5	Batra and Stayman (1991)	0.95
Involvement	18	Zaichowsky (1985)	0.884

4.5b Validity:

Validity of the instrument was ensured after extensive literature review. Since the instrument for the study was built by using items from existing validated scale, thereby the face validity was established. Moreover, the scales used in the study are mainly maturity scales developed by previous researchers, and the required sample data are obtained through questionnaires, too. The results of statistical analysis show that the KMO values of three variables, self-brand connection, brand attitude and Involvement are 0.889, 0.868 and 0.961, reliability is all at a high level, too. So the validity of sample survey can also be accepted.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION :

1. To study the causal relationship between self brand connection and attitude towards brand.

The primary objective of the study is to ascertain causal relationship between self brand connection and attitude towards brand. Therefore, a regression analysis has been undertaken with self brand connection as independent variable and attitude as a dependent variable.

The results of the ANOVA test from (table 5.1) depicts that the p value is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), thus leading to the conclusion that there exists a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variable i.e between brand attitude and self brand connection.

Further regression analysis result suggests that, the R square value of (0.208) in (table 5.2) indicates that self brand connection causes approximately 21% variation in attitude among adolescents. Also, the Beta coefficient (table 5.3) suggests that self brand connection has a positive relationship with brand attitude as ($\beta = 0.456$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, the results indicates that there is causal relationship between the two main variable i.e. self brand connection and brand attitude.

Table: 5.1 ANOVA: Self brand connection and Product Involvement

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	179.651	1	179.651	146.520	.000 ^b
Residual	684.171	558	1.226		
Total	863.821	559			

a. Dependent Variable: attitude ; b. Predictors: (Constant), sbc

Table 5.2 Regression Analysis: Self brand connection and Attitude

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.456 ^a	.208	.207	1.10730	.208	146.520	1	558	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), sbc ; b. Dependent Variable: attitude

Table 5.3 : Regression Coefficients : Self brand connection and Attitude

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	2.918	.240		12.156	.000	2.447	3.390
	Sbc	.534	.456	12.105	.000	.448	.621

a. Dependent Variable: attitude

- To find out the relationship between Self brand connection and product involvement

The correlation analysis has been used to study the relationship between SBC and product involvement. The table (5.4) depicts that the p value has been found to be statistically significant ($p=0.000$), thus leading to the conclusion that there exists a linear relationship between self brand connection and product involvement. Moreover the table evidently indicates that the self-brand connection ($\beta=0.590$; $p=0.000$) has a positive correlation with product involvement. Thus, confirming that there is a strong positive relationship between self brand connection and product involvement among adolescent consumers.

Table 5.4: Correlation Analysis: Self brand connection (SBC) and Product Involvement(PI)

		SBC	PI
SBC	Pearson Correlation	1	.590**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	560	560
PI	Pearson Correlation	.590**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	560	560

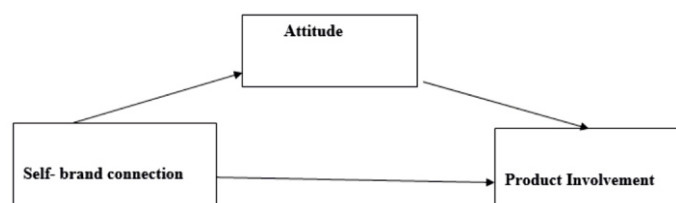
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- To investigate the mediating role of attitude on Self brand connection and product involvement relationship

There is a significant positive relationship between self brand connection, attitude and product involvement which has been proved by the above analysis. Therefore, to find out the mediating effect of attitude on self brand connection and product involvement, Baron and Kenny's (1986) linear equation method has been followed. According to this method, a variable may be considered a mediator to the extent to which it carries the influence of a given independent variable (IV) to a given dependent variable (DV). Generally speaking, mediation can be said to occur when

- the IV significantly affects the mediator,
- the IV significantly affects the DV in the absence of the mediator,
- the mediator has a significant unique effect on the DV, and
- the effect of the IV on the DV shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model.

However, the assessment of the significance of the reduction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables cannot be assessed by a visual inspection of the coefficients. It has to be assessed mathematically.



The impact of attitude as a mediator between self brand connection (Independent variable) and product involvement (Dependent variable) has been studied in the following steps:

Table 5.6 :Regression of mediator attitude and self brand connection

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.836	.155		18.325	.000
	SBC	.491	.028	.590	17.257	.000

a. Dependent Variable: attitude

The table 5.5 shows the result of relationship between self brand connection (IV) and product involvement (DV) where value of $\beta=0.590$ and $p<0.05$ shows the significance level and a high positive relationship between the independent variable self brand connection and dependent variable involvement and table 1.5.6 shows the result of regression of mediator attitude (DV) on self brand connection (IV) which depicts $\beta=0.456$ and $p<0.05$. Thus, it also clearly shows a positive relationship between mediator attitude and independent variable self brand connection.

Table 5.7: Regression equation of self brand connection on product involvement controlling the mediator attitude

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.973	.155		12.745	.000
	sbc	.333	.028	.400	11.713	.000
	a	.296	.024	.416	12.183	.000

a. Dependent Variable: involvement

The results of table 5.7 depicts the impact of mediator attitude on self brand connection (IV) and product involvement (DV). It can be seen from table 1.5.5 and table 5.7 that the Beta coefficient for self brand connection and product involvement reduces from 0.590 to 0.400 when attitude is added as a mediator to the regression, thus suggesting that attitude variable is exerting a partial mediating effect.

Thus, according to this mediation analysis it has been confirmed that attitude partially mediates the relationship between self brand connection and product Involvement.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:

The above research work highlights the relationship between self brand connection, brand attitude, and product involvement among adolescent consumers. This paper is an effort to establish that in developing country like India, adolescents consumers have high awareness and desire for high quality products therefore they have become exceptionally brand conscious.

They feel superior when they link their self concept with the brands they acquire and build up strong connectivity with them. The adolescents have emerged as the most promising consumer segment and have shown a lot of curiosity in shopping of different brands available in the market.

The analysis further states that strong self brand connection among adolescents leads to creation of higher brand attitude among them. They build up high connection with the brands and therefore develop an attitude towards them. Therefore, this study has established that there is a strong positive relationship between self brand connection and attitude. Thus, marketers should think of strategies as a result of which the adolescents establish connectivity with more and more brands and over a period of time and this connection gets further strengthened leading to higher product involvement.

Furthermore, this paper has also highlighted that product involvement among adolescents has been because of their higher self connectivity with the brands they purchase. This paper lays stress on the fact that brand involvement is related with the self brand connection and the results show that there is a high correlation between self brand connection and involvement. Hence, self brand connection is positively related to brand involvement.

Therefore, further analysis of the data shows that attitude also has a mediating effect on self brand connection and product involvement.

Hence, to increase sales and confine to more and more consumer markets, marketers have to build high customer brand relationship among adolescents consumers and this is probable only when they will show strengthened association among self brand connection, attitude and involvement.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The study has certain limitations. firstly, the data has been collected by using survey method and questionnaires were administered personally by explaining the statements of the questionnaire to the adolescents respondents, therefore, chances of error due to misunderstanding can't be ruled out. Secondly, the study has been done on adolescents consumer, who have a unpredictable mindset and from time to time their mind set changes and thus has an impact on the responses they gave.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH:

The future researchers can explore the relationship of self brand connection-attitude-involvement among youth of India who also constitute majority of the population of India and have tremendous spending pattern. They can also work on different self concepts and have an elaborate study on how these self concepts have an impact upon self brand connection, attitude and product involvement.

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